

Island's terns nest again after unsuccessful start

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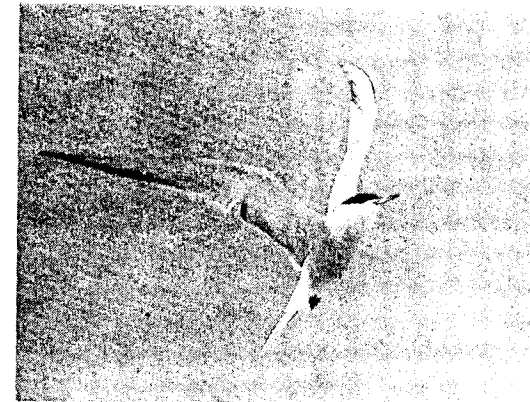
For five consecutive summers the Trustees of Reservations have directed a program on Nantucket for the protection of the terns which nest in several colonies around the Island. The dominant tern on the Island is the Least Tern, the smallest of the species. However the Common, Arctic and Roseate Terns are often seen.

The terns nest near the high tide line on the beach. Their two eggs are laid in nothing more than a scrape in the sand. Due to the storms earlier this summer, the terns had a difficult time establishing a successful colony. Nests at Surfside, Low Beach and Great Point were washed away by heavy rains and high crashing waves which resulted from the storm swell. Eventually the birds settled into two

large colonies and re-nested for the second time this summer.

Reaching well over 300 birds, the colony along the south-west shore at Low Beach is the largest nesting area on Nantucket. The colony begins on the beach in front of the United States Coast Guard Loran Station and continues all the way down to Tom Nevers Head. The second colony is at Great Point, north of the Galls area.

It appears that the terns formed two large colonies instead of several moderate size colonies around the Island because of a reduction in the available habitat. Where the south shore was historically used for nesting for well over a century, now it is unsuitable. The shoreline there has narrowed due to erosion. The shortened beach with Off Road Vehicles and sun bathers allows no room for nesting terns.

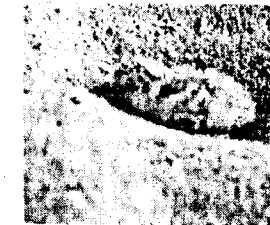


Photos are of Least Terns.

Terns were run off of Coatue Point within the past few years by the large gull population there and encroaching vegetation. Dredging at Quidnet destroyed nests last year which resulted in the desertion of that site. Beaches that seem to be desirable nesting locations in May when the terns first migrate back to Nantucket, later become crowded with recreational use.

The terns are currently nesting in the two best possible locations remaining on the Island. The colony at Great Point is well protected as it is part of the Coaskat Coatue Wildlife Refuge which is jointly overseen by the Trustees of Reservations and the Nantucket Conservation Foundation. Most of the tern colony at Low Beach is on Coast Guard property. The personnel at the Loran Station have been wonderful about sharing their summer beach with the birds. Other Low Beach

residents have expressed great interest in the terns and have been very cooperative.



The major concern throughout the season is their productivity. If a mated pair can raise a young tern to fly, to migrate with the others in the fall, then perhaps the population will remain stable or even increase. Unfortunately, the loss of chicks due to storms or predation from hawks and owls is great. But those are natural and uncontrollable. It is the occasional careless and thoughtless actions by humans that are the most unacceptable and un-

necessary. From the beginning, the program has tried to educate and increase public awareness in hopes that this will prevent unnecessary disturbance and destruction within the tern colonies.

Public awareness and concern is increasing. Many people I meet on the beach mention that they became aware of the Tern Protection Program from the posters which we had placed on the Steamship Authority vessels a year ago. And the Nantucket student volunteers are good about spreading the information to their friends and families. It seems as though a little interest and concern can go a long way.

We never know what we will find when we go out each morning. Things may have been going along fine the previous day but we arrive and discover that a short-eared owl has snatched an adult tern right off its nest, ripped off its wings and left them behind as evidence. Or maybe chicks have been run over by an unaware beach driver. It is the most frustrating and discouraging part of this work. On the other hand, there is the day when the chick that we have observed for weeks finally takes its first flight towards the future of its species. Those are rewarding days that must make it all worth it.

It did not begin as a good summer for the terns. Nevertheless, those in the Tern Protection Program are working to see that a few more of those chicks reach that flight towards the future.